

**Najib offers pre-poll goodies for Sarawak**  
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has travelled to a key state on Borneo island to make multi-million-dollar development promises in a bid to galvanise support ahead of landmark elections.

Najib arrived at the remote highland village of Long Banga in Sarawak state by helicopter on Thursday, accompanied by a high-powered team including four senior ministers.

NONELocal politicians have said that state polls could be held in Sarawak as early as October, and the BN coalition - which rules nationally - is intent on a big win after the humiliating 2008 general elections.

Pundits say that fresh nationwide elections could follow soon after the Sarawak polls, which will provide the BN with an indication of levels of support on Borneo that are key to its holding power nationally.

Najib's four-hour visit to Long Banga, home to indigenous tribespeople, comes after the BN suffered a disastrous defeat to the opposition in a parliamentary by-election in Sarawak in May.

The premier was in an ebullient mood after receiving a spectacular welcome in Long Banga, telling some 2,000 people from the Penan, Kayan, Saban and Kenyah tribes that their welfare and economic needs will be guaranteed.

He was treated to a traditional hornbill dance, and performers in bright yellow and black outfits sang songs calling for the resolution of long-standing problems like land rights and infrastructure.

"The response is great. It was very spontaneous. The promises will be delivered," Najib told AFP.

'We are frustrated'

The premier pledged 100 million ringgit (over 31 million dollars) to complete the long overdue Beluru-Lapok road which connects the coastal town of Miri and villages in Baram district deep in Borneo's interior.

He allocated six million ringgit for a mini hydro-electric dam for Long Banga, one million ringgit for a road linking the village to an airport, and 500,000 ringgit for a mobile medical clinic.

azlanOne Penan family trekked five hours through the jungle to hear Najib's pledges.

"We have heard many promises. We are frustrated as our land problems are not solved yet," Daud Sedin, 35, told AFP. "Maybe I will turn to the opposition now."

The Penan are some of the most disadvantaged of Malaysia's indigenous people. Najib did not address complaints that their traditional land is being razed by logging and plantations, nor allegations of rape by timber company workers against Penan women.

Henry Tugak, 52, a member of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, a governing coalition member and the ruling party in Sarawak, said many voters were dissatisfied after two decades of promises to build the Lapok road.

"Najib came here to steer Sarawakians to vote BN. But it is going to be tough. Victory is not going to be easy as there is also unhappiness with chief minister Abdul Taib Mahmud. Morally he should go," he said.

Taib has been in power in Sarawak for 29 years and voters and businesses are increasingly disgruntled with his long reign.

Malaysia's political landscape was transformed in the 2008 national elections which saw the opposition secure unprecedented gains, seizing five states and a third of parliamentary seats and threatening the BN's half-century grip on power.

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